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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA  
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SUBJECT: EGYPT: CODEL JOHNSON DISCUSSES WATER WITH MINISTER OF WATER RESOURCES ABU ZEID

Sensitive but unclassified, not for Internet distribution.

¶1. (SBU) Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources Mahmoud Abu Zeid briefed the DCM and a CODEL led by Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) on January 6 on the challenges Egypt faces regarding water and its cooperation with the other nine Nile Basin states. The CODEL consisted of Representative Johnson, Representative John Boozman (R-AR), Representative Corrine Brown (D-FL), Representative Jerry Costello (D-IL), Representative John Duncan (R-TN), Representative Mary Fallin (R-OK), Representative Tim Holden (D-PA), Representative Carolyn Kilpatrick (D-MI), Representative Laura Richardson (D-CA), and Representative Nydia Velazquez (D-NY).

¶2. (SBU) Abu Zeid said that improving Egypt's irrigation and reclamation systems are the most urgent needs to ensure that Egypt's growing population will have enough clean water for the foreseeable future. According to Abu Zeid, although 95 percent of Egyptians have fresh water, sanitation and recycling drainage water is a challenge. Only 60 percent of drainage water is treated in Cairo and Alexandria, with only four percent treated outside the main cities. Regulating usage of increasingly scarce water resources is also a problem; Abu Zeid cited the example of rice and sugarcane farmers, who use more water than the government mandates because of the high export price of their products. Asked about problems with pesticides and industrial run-off, Abu Zeid acknowledged this as a problem but noted that Egypt is focusing on basic water sanitation, currently a greater concern.

¶3. (SBU) To deal with water resource issues internally, Abu Zeid said that President Mubarak announced an LE 20 million (USD 3.7 million) project to develop water resources in the villages as part of his election platform. As this is only a small part of Egypt's needs, Abu Zeid said that the GOE still relies heavily on foreign donors. He thanked the CODEL for USAID's water infrastructure and policy assistance over the years, noting that all of his ministry's top experts were trained under USAID programs. Abu Zeid noted that in recent years USAID has moved away from infrastructure assistance and focused on policy support, a decision which Abu Zeid bemoaned - "we need both." Abu Zeid also lobbied for USAID to support "horizontal" projects to expand water resources to new satellite cities in the desert outside Cairo.

¶4. (SBU) Regarding Egypt's relations with the other nine Nile Basin countries, Abu Zeid said that no one agreement on sharing water

resources among the ten countries yet exists, and that Egypt has only one bilateral agreement (with Sudan) on the issue. However, the Nile Basin Initiative, proposed by Egypt in 1994 and signed in 1999, is "98 percent complete" and will provide a framework for the countries to examine proposed water resource projects to ensure that they provide the maximum benefit for each country. A commission is still working out the exact details of this framework, he said. Abu Zeid was confident that many beneficial projects are possible, as the Nile Basin countries use only five percent of the water that nature provides every year, but the infrastructure to exploit the water does not yet exist.

¶5. (U) CODEL Johnson did not clear this message. RICCIARDONE